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Wayne County hosts Indiana Secretary of State

Lawson meets with county election officials to discuss vote center concept

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Voters cast ballots at First Baptist Church in Richmond on Election Day last November. Election leaders from other counties around Indiana and even western Ohio visited Richmond this week to discuss the concept. / Palladium-Item file photo



Written by
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Secretary of State Connie Lawson visited Wayne County this week to kick off a series of regional meetings that will take place around the state with county election officials interested in the vote center concept for elections beginning in 2014.

The meeting at the Wayne County Administration Building included representatives from Fayette, Hancock, Henry, Randolph, Rush and Union counties in Indiana, as well as representatives from Butler County, Ohio.

x In February 2011, Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels signed a bill into law that allows any Indiana county to use the centralized vote centers in future elections.

Lawson said Wayne County was a great place to host the first meeting since Wayne County Clerk Jo Ann Stewart has been at the forefront of the vote center movement in Indiana.

"Wayne County is very fortunate to have Jo Ann Stewart as clerk," Lawson said. "She has been very generous working with non-vote center counties and answering their questions. With the smaller (regional) groups that are meeting, Jo Ann has even offered to come to speak to those groups during the other meetings."

Wayne County began testing vote centers in 2007 along with Cass and Tippecanoe counties, and over the past few elections, voters in Wayne County have said they enjoy having the flexibility to vote at different times, including weekends, and have multiple locations around the county where they can vote.

Previously, residents had to vote in precincts set up near their home on election days, which made it difficult for some people who work

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Connie Lawson

outside the area to get to the polls before or after work.

"Most people hate change, and I think some of the officials are worried that the voters will hate it because it is different," Stewart said. "But when we changed, our voters were the biggest advocates of the vote centers."

Under vote center systems, counties replace the neighborhood precincts with more centralized centers at places such as fire departments, senior centers, grocery stores or shopping malls. Wayne County has used the Kuhlman Center, First English Lutheran Church and the Townsend Community Center for vote centers in Richmond, while churches and community centers have been home to vote centers around the county.

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